



Northeastern States Research Cooperative 2023 Request for Proposals

Letters of Intent due August 28, 2023 by 4:30pm EST
Proposals due September 26, 2023 by 4:30pm EST

The mission of the Northeastern States Research Cooperative (NSRC) is to foster research that is relevant and beneficial to the people who live within the Northern Forest boundaries, work with its resources, use its products, visit it, and care about it.

NSRC aims to link research to practice to make a difference in forest-based communities. In this request for proposals (RFP), NSRC seeks to advance problem-driven research that yields actionable results useful to and used by forest stakeholders and decision-makers.

NSRC funds research, supports outreach, and catalyzes actions that balance protection and utilization of the Northern Forest.

The Northeastern States Research Cooperative (NSRC) is a research-granting program administered collaboratively by the USDA Forest Service Northern Research Station, the Rubenstein School of Environment and Natural Resources at the University of Vermont, the Department of Natural Resources and the Environment at the University of New Hampshire, the Center for Research on Sustainable Forests at the University of Maine, the State University of New York College of Environmental Science and Forestry, and the Hubbard Brook Research Foundation.

The NSRC's research priorities are guided by an External Advisory Committee (EAC), selected to represent the communities, businesses, industries, and agencies in the Northern Forest region that contribute to and benefit from knowledge generated through NSRC-funded projects. The primary role of the EAC is to provide advice about the specific research needs for the region.

The NSRC is committed to advancing practical applications of forest research and to supporting a diverse, equitable, and inclusive research program. We encourage proposals that are relevant to Tribal Nations and Indigenous communities in the region. In addition, a separate RFP for NSRC's 2023 Indigenous Forest Knowledge Fund is forthcoming. (For more information on that program, visit www.nsrcforest.org/indigenous-forest-knowledge-fund.)

For details about the history and mission of the NSRC and information about all past and ongoing NSRC projects, consult the NSRC website at www.nsrcforest.org. For information about the organization and governance, consult the NSRC at www.nsrcforest.org/governance.

Research Focus, Topics, and Engagement

The NSRC funds research with clear links to application and use by stakeholders and decision-makers in the Northern Forest region. Successful proposals will clearly articulate the research

question they are asking, their rationale for why that question is important to stakeholders, and their strategy for making their results actionable.

Focus Areas. Proposals should encompass one or more of the following focus areas.

1. ***State of the forest:*** Research that elucidates the state of the Northern Forest region, with preference given to projects related to forest health and those with predictive power.
2. ***Measuring and quantifying impacts:*** Research that measures/quantifies ecological, social, policy, management, and economic changes in the Northern Forest, with consideration for how to create shared or standardized measurement approaches across the region.
3. ***Developing tools for response:*** Research that leads to practical, standardized tools for practitioners and other decision-makers to predict and respond to change. These tools could include management approaches/techniques, new technologies or applications, decision support tools, and messaging/communication strategies.
4. ***Rural community and economic development:*** Research that addresses the challenges of forest-based communities and economies and contributes to a shared vision of the region's future.

Priority Issues. NSRC encourages proposals that address one or more of these priority issues relevant to the Northern Forest region:

Invasive pests and diseases

- Insect- and disease-related pressures on the forest and concerns about vulnerabilities due to lack of stand diversity
- Research that can help detect issues earlier and provide the ability to respond sooner
- Health of culturally significant species, including brown or black ash
- Benefits and limitations of response options to invasive pests

Climate change and energy: mitigation, adaptation, and carbon accounting

- Forests and forest-related industries as part of the solution to climate change
- Managing for carbon, measuring/accounting for carbon, and setting up/accessing carbon markets
- Forest management strategies for increasing resilience to climate change
- Tradeoffs between biomass and other energy sources
- Quantifying ecological impacts of solar and wind farms (e.g., tradeoffs between renewable energy and loss of forest cover)

Land use, sustainable forestry, and forest fragmentation

- Role and future of privately-owned lands that keep forests as forests (e.g., incentives, conservation finance, alternative markets)
- Effective messaging and communication tools for working with private forest landowners
- Challenges of navigating management for a variety of competing needs (e.g., wildlife habitat, carbon, resilience)
- Concerns about regeneration and stand diversity
- Potential for increased fragmentation with migration to rural areas
- Water quality impacts from forest management strategies, changes in land use, sustainable forestry, and forest fragmentation

Forest products industry and innovative technologies

- Concerns about workforce and market declines, need for innovations in products and

technologies

- Need for engagement with external stakeholder groups about sustainable wood products (e.g., corporate sustainability officers, engineering and architectural groups, business associations)
- Opportunities at the intersections of job creation, sustainable forestry, and climate change mitigation
- Impacts of industrial sugaring on wildlife, site productivity, and ecological function

Recreation and tourism

- Managing for recreation and tourism
- Understanding visitor motivations and behaviors
- “Carrying capacity” of lands and waters
- Economic impacts of outdoor recreation and tourism
- Recreation impacts on wildlife
- Land use impacts on recreation

Environmental justice, equity, and inclusion

- Creating more inclusive communities, conservation lands, and recreational opportunities within the Northern Forest
- Matters of equity, consideration about who pays for and who benefits from ecosystem services, including air and water quality
- Access for Tribal citizens and Indigenous community members to forest lands for hunting, gathering, and cultural practices
- Indigenous youth engagement for advancing Traditional Ecological Knowledge and scientific education, research, and training
- Engagement with partners from Tribal Nations in the region and recognition of Traditional Ecological Knowledge of the Northern Forest

Biodiversity and connectivity

- Addressing terrestrial, riparian, and aquatic biodiversity and connectivity
- Balancing management for carbon with long-term biodiversity and sustainability goals
- Geography, scope, and configuration of conserved and working lands needed to support biodiversity
- Wildlife, species recovery, species adaptation

NSRC prioritizes problem-driven, engaged research with solid communications to stakeholders. Partnerships between researchers and practitioners are strongly encouraged, as are projects that aim to inform and align with the timeframes of management and policy decisions. NSRC encourages projects that may be at different **stages of development**, including:

1. Early-stage partnership development and problem investigation
2. New investigations with regional scope and importance
3. Synthesis of existing knowledge, perspectives, and tools/resources
4. Implementation of research results to practice
5. Scaling a local project or result to the broader Northern Forest region

Timeline

- **August 28, 2023: Letters of Intent due electronically by 4:30pm EST**
- Acknowledgement of letters of intent issued upon receipt
- **September 26, 2023: Proposals due by 4:30pm EST**
- **February 1, 2024: Notification of funding decisions**

Eligibility

Who may apply? NSRC encourages applicants from all races, ethnicities, national origins, genders, sexual orientations, and career stages. This program is an equal opportunity provider. Participation in this RFP is open to scientists, resource managers, policy makers, and other stakeholders pursuing research relevant to forest lands in the northern tier of New York, Vermont, New Hampshire, and Maine. Any field research proposed must be conducted in or near the boundaries of the Northern Forest. The PI *must* be from an institution, business, agency, or organization in one of the four NSRC states. Other investigators with expertise in the Northern Forest may be part of the proposal regardless of geographic location. To distribute funds as broadly as possible, a researcher may submit only one proposal to this RFP as the lead-PI. A researcher may be a co-PI or collaborator on multiple proposals to this RFP.

Participation by USFS personnel in projects is encouraged. Special conditions apply to USFS employees who submit proposals as PIs or Co-PIs. Potential USFS PIs or Co-PIs should speak with the NSRC Federal Coordinator (listed at end of this RFP) before submitting the letter of intent and when developing the full proposal and budget. Cooperation on projects by USFS scientists and staff will be considered in the final stage of the review process and is described in greater detail below.

A *letter of intent is required* to be eligible to submit a full proposal. Any eligible PI(s) may submit a proposal based on their letter of intent, as long as the letter of intent was received prior to the deadline.

Who may NOT apply? PIs who are delinquent with terms of current or previous NSRC awards, such as final or progress reports, are not eligible to apply for NSRC funds until outstanding award terms have been met.

Budget Considerations

Funding Source: Funding from the United States Department of Agriculture Forest Service is made under the authority of Forest and Rangeland Renewable Resources Research Act of 1978 (Public Law 95-307), as amended (16 U.S.C. 1641-1646, Public Law 108-198, December 31, 2003). The Federal Assistance Listing (formerly Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance - CFDA) number and name are 10.652. Forestry Research.

Duration and Budget Limits: Proposals may be submitted for projects with a duration of one to three years, with a start date no earlier than March 1, 2024, and no later than September 1, 2024. We recognize that projects at different stages of development and with different scopes have different budget needs. Therefore, budget requests may range from \$75,000 to \$500,000. NSRC

expects to be able to make nearly \$5.5 million available for project awards from this RFP. The exact number of projects that can be funded will be a function of the budget sizes of high-ranking proposals received. Based on past experience, we expect to fund between 15 and 25 projects. Each project will be funded through a single award to the PI's institution/organization. The lead PI's organization may issue sub-awards or sub-contracts as described in the research proposal. However, at least 50% of the federal budget must be managed directly by a PI or co-PI in one of the four NSRC states.

Equipment: Federal NSRC funds may *not* be used to purchase equipment (defined as \$5,000 or more per unit and a useful life of more than one year). Equipment purchased with non-federal dollars may be used as matching funding, as long as Uniform Guidance rules are followed. See CFR-2014-title2-vol11-sec200-306.

Indirect Costs: Applicants to the NSRC RFP may use their institution's or organization's federally negotiated indirect cost rate (NICRA), also called overhead or facilities and administration (F&A) rate. Applicants may elect to charge an indirect cost rate that is lower than their maximum rate for a federal sponsor. In this case, the indirect costs foregone may be used as matching funding for the proposed project, if allowed by the institution's indirect cost policy. If an institution or organization does not have a federally negotiated indirect cost rate agreement, a 10% of modified total direct costs (de minimis rate) can be used.

Matching Funds: As specified in statute, NSRC must give **preference** to research proposals that offer non-federal cost share (matching funds) in an amount not less than 50% of the federal funds requested (i.e., \$0.5 non-federal cost share for each \$1 federal awarded) in cases where proposals are evaluated to have equal merit. Matching funds will be considered in the final funding decision stage of the review process. Matching funds may derive from indirect costs foregone, direct expenditures from non-federal funding sources, or in-kind contributions, as described in uniform guidance for federally funded projects. Matching sources must be described in detail in the budget narrative, especially for non-federal and in-kind sources. Additional documentation of these sources may be required.

Review Process

All reviewers will abide by the NSRC's [Conflict of Interest and Confidentiality Statement](#). Reviewers will also be encouraged to watch this [Tips for Reviewers](#) video from the National Science Foundation so that reviewers will be able to provide constructive feedback and avoid unintentional biases.

Letters of Intent

Receipt of all letters of intent will be acknowledged, but there will be no assessment of the intellectual or technical merit of the proposed project.

Proposals

Technical Review

All proposals will be reviewed by at least two external experts (researchers, practitioners, or both). Please note that, as part of the letter of intent, PIs are invited to nominate expert reviewers with whom they have no known conflicts of interest. The external experts will score proposals using

the criteria listed below and respond to three short-answer questions to help prioritize closely ranked proposals. Anonymized reviewers' responses to the short-answer questions will be sent to PI(s) in February 2024, when funding decisions are made.

Criteria:

1. The **problem** is clearly defined, justified, and relevant to the Northern Forest.
2. The project **goals and supporting objectives** clearly address the problem and have potential benefit to the Northern Forest.
3. The **approach and methods** are well defined and appropriate.
4. The **budget** fits the scope of work proposed and has a favorable cost-benefit ratio.
5. There is a high **likelihood of success** within the project period.

Short-answer questions:

1. Describe the major strengths of the proposal.
2. Describe the major weaknesses of the proposal.
3. Given adequate resources, would you recommend this proposal for funding and why?

Prioritization of Top-ranked Proposals

The NSRC Executive Committee ([EC](#)) will rank all submitted proposals based on technical merit and applicability to the NSRC RFP. The EC will recommend approximately thirty to fifty top-ranked proposals for review by the Full Proposal Review Panel (FPRP).

Full Proposal Review Panel

An *ad hoc* FPRP will be composed of forest stakeholders who have reasonable knowledge of the areas covered by the annual RFP and how this knowledge could serve regional stakeholders. Each proposal chosen for review by the FPRP will be fully reviewed by two FPRP members. The FPRP will use the criteria listed below to evaluate full proposals, and the FPRP reviewers will respond to three short-answer questions. Anonymized reviewers' responses to the short-answer questions will be sent to PI(s) in February 2024, when funding decisions are made.

Criteria:

1. Proposal clearly states (a) **problem** of practice or (b) **research question or hypothesis** to be addressed and why it is important in the Northern Forest.
2. The problem to be addressed is well-defined, with an appropriate **approach and methods** that correlate to a high likelihood of success within the project period.
3. The project is **widely applicable** to the NSRC region (versus narrow benefit to a specific location or entity).
4. The proposal has a solid **rationale and communications plan, and outputs** will lead to wide use by practitioners, decision-makers, or other target audiences.
5. **Partners and stakeholders will be involved** throughout the design and execution of the project.
6. The project demonstrates a favorable **cost-benefit ratio** and justifies the requested budget.
7. The project has high or exceptional **potential to address stakeholder priorities** in the Northern Forest.

Short-answer questions:

1. Describe the major strengths of the proposal.
2. Describe the major weaknesses of the proposal.
3. Given limited resources, would you recommend this proposal for funding? Why?

The entire FPRP will discuss and rank the proposals during the FPRP meeting (in-person or virtual).

Funding Decisions

The NSRC EC will consider the rankings of the FPRP to decide on the final slate of funded proposals. Additional considerations the EC may use to determine the final slate of successful proposals are:

1. Per statute, in cases where proposals are evaluated to have equal merit, the NSRC will prioritize proposals that offer non-federal cost share (matching funds) in an amount not less than 50% of the federal funds requested.
2. The EC will assure that at least 25% of NSRC-funded research projects show coordination with Forest Service research.
3. Projects that have the potential to lead to new, lasting partnerships across institutions and entities in the Northern Forest region, particularly across forest boundaries.
4. Broad geographic distribution of projects/lead institutions across the NSRC region.
5. Projects led by early-career PIs and/or support substantive involvement of graduate and undergraduate researchers.
6. NSRC-funded projects will address a range of priority issues and stages of project development.

Funding decisions and reviewer comments will be sent to PIs in February 2024.

Letters of Intent and Submission Instructions

Letters of Intent (LOI) must provide the required information to be accepted and are a pre-requisite to proposal submission. Letters of intent will describe the research topic and relevance to the RFP, goals and objectives and approach or methods, and the relevance to stakeholders. A detailed budget, budget narrative, Curriculum Vitae (CVs), figures, tables, references, and appendices are not required or allowed in the letter of intent.

LOI Requirements: LOIs are to be submitted via Google forms at:

<https://forms.gle/NHDbq9XgLfBdkwoMA>.

1. PI Email
2. Project title
3. Principal investigator name and institution
 - List only one person here. This person will be the sole contact for all NSRC communication and should forward NSRC updates to Co-PIs and others.
4. Project collaborators name, institution, email address, role in the project
 - List persons or entities who will be directly supported by the proposed project or who will contribute documented matching resources to the project.
 - Roles may include Co-PI, Co-researcher, Research User, etc.
5. Estimated total amount of NSRC funds to be requested
6. Estimated non-federal cost share funds to be provided (if any)
7. Project duration in years
8. Select Focus Area(s)
9. Select Priority Issue(s)
10. Research topic and relevance to RFP (limited to 1,000 characters, approximately 150 words)
11. Goals and objectives and approach or methods (limited to 2,000 characters, approximately 300 words)
12. Relevance to stakeholders and how the project will lead to application and use in the Northern Forest (limited to 1,000 characters, approximately 150 words)
13. Will there be US Forest Service employees on this proposal as Co-PIs or Cooperators? (Yes, No or Maybe)
14. Potential technical reviewers
 - Please suggest 6 or more technical reviewers including both researchers and practitioners (from public or private sector management or extension agencies) with whom you have no known conflict of interest.
 - Please include names, institutions, and email addresses.

If a confirmation email from Google Forms (subject “Northeastern States Research Cooperative 2023 Letter of Intent to Submit Proposal”) is not received after submitting the LOI, please contact an NSRC program manager, listed on the last page of this RFP.

Proposal Content

Please include the following in your proposal in 12-point (or greater) Times New Roman font.

1. Title Page

The proposal narrative should include the following elements.

- Heading: “2023 NSRC Proposal”
- Project Title
- Principal Investigator (name, affiliation, address, telephone number(s) and email)
- Project collaborators names, institutions, email addresses, roles in the project. Roles may include Co-PI, Cooperator, Research User, etc. Forest Service collaborations should be highlighted, as the Forest Service requires NSRC-funded research projects show tangible coordination with Forest Service research. Please also indicate any early career PIs or collaborators (defined as <7 years since last degree).
- Total amount of NSRC funds requested and the amounts requested per year
- Total amount of matching funds offered (if any) and the amounts offered per year
- Total project costs (total amount of NSRC funds requested and matching funds offered)

2. Abstract (limited to 250 words, approximately one-half of a page)

The abstract should briefly summarize the overall research project, including the problem, research question/s, specific objectives, approach or methods, expected outputs and/or outcomes, and short- and long-term benefits for the Northern Forest and its stakeholders and communities. If the proposal is funded, this summary will become the basis for public documents describing NSRC-supported research projects. The abstract should be written for a wide-ranging audience with limited use of field-related terminology.

3. Proposal Narrative (Six pages maximum)

The proposal narrative should include the following elements.

- **Introduction:** A summary of the issue(s), why the project needs to be done, and the benefits derived. How will this project address the specific focus areas and priority issues in the Northeastern States Research Cooperative RFP?
- **Project Goals and Supporting Objectives:** Include a clear statement of the project goals and specific objective(s). Clearly state the a) problem of practice or b) research question or hypothesis to be addressed. Submissions proposing basic research must clearly document an end user who will endorse that the proposed work would be beneficial, even if it is risky.
- **Project Justification and Relevance: why it is important in the Northern Forest.** This section is intended to describe how the proposed project is relevant and beneficial to the Northern Forest region, including the people who live within its boundaries, work with its resources, use its products, visit it, and care about it. Provide a concise review and synthesis of existing knowledge to justify your goals and objectives. If your proposal builds on research previously funded by NSRC or part of a larger effort where NSRC funds may leverage or complement other funds, please take special care to explain this connection. Also include the rationale behind the current need for the proposed research and its timeliness. Be

sure to describe the project’s potential for *application* to Northern Forest lands and communities and how will it address the needs and interests of stakeholder groups in the Northern Forest region (Who will directly benefit from the results of the proposed research and why do the beneficiaries or stakeholders that you have defined need this research?). This section is intended to provide peer reviewers with evidence that the proposed work addresses concerns in the Northern Forest four-state region as stipulated in the RFP. Although the literature may be extensive, the synthesis should be restricted to the most important and/or most relevant sources.

- **Approach and Methodology:** Include a clear description of the proposed research methods without going into detailed statistical or technical descriptions and formulas. This section should include concise details of methodology as well as justification that would allow a diverse group of reviewers to assess (1) the merits of the proposed methods in providing long-term, credible, scientifically rigorous results; (2) the degree to which partners and stakeholders are involved throughout design and execution of the project.; (3) the qualifications of the researchers to successfully complete the proposed study; and (4) the roles and responsibility of *all* collaborators and cooperators listed on the project.
- **Expected Products, Outputs, and Possible Outcomes:** Include an explicit description of expected products, outputs, and possible outcomes as well as the benefits of the research project for lands and communities of the Northern Forest region. Remember that “outcomes” are different from “products and outputs.” Outputs are specific deliverables such as a report, workshop, or dataset that should be deliverable by the conclusion of the project. Outcomes are changed behaviors, attitudes, understanding or conditions within the community that may take some time to mature. Consider who wants this information and why. Fully describe (1) communication plans for how research results and products will serve and be disseminated to stakeholder groups and communities in the region, and (2) how you expect practitioners, decision makers or other target audiences to widely use the results of your research. *Note:* Funded proposals will be required to submit annual progress reports and a final report that follows the NSRC-specified format. These required outputs do not need to be described in the proposal.
- **U.S. Forest Service Collaboration** (if applicable): Please describe the nature of the proposed role (co-PI, collaborator, etc.) and project involvement by any Forest Service employees on the project.

4. References and Citations (Two pages maximum)

Citation page formatting may include smaller font sizes and/or spacing.

5. Project Timeline (One page maximum)

Include a **project timeline** to show your plans for managing the project over the course of the proposed project period.

6. Budget and Budget Narrative

Use the **budget and budget narrative template** found on the [General NSRC Grant Award webpage](#). Budget details regarding non-federal cost share should mirror the categories and level of specificity found in the federal budget request. The budget narrative template is located in the same Excel workbook as the budget. The budget narrative should describe the requested funding

and matching funding (if provided) in sufficient detail to allow an independent review panel to assess the likelihood of meeting project objectives with the proposed funding level. The budget narrative is critical for reviewers to understand budget allocation choices that might not be clearly explained in the project narrative or budget table. It is required that the budget narrative address *each* component of the federal and cost share budget. Persons or entities that would receive NSRC funds must be explained and justified in sufficient detail to judge whether the requested funds are warranted. See “Budget Considerations” section above for details on equipment, indirect costs and matching funds.

Subawards: A subaward budget in the same format as the proposal budget is required for any subawards described in the application. To be clear, the main proposal should have the annual budgets of subaward(s) listed. An additional budget and budget narrative form is required for each subaward in the same Excel workbook.

Budgets and budget narratives should be converted to PDF and combined with the overall proposal PDF prior to submission. Please contact an NSRC program manager if help is needed with the process.

7. Résumés or CVs

Include resumes or curriculum vitae (CV) of the PI, co-PI, and any other cooperators specifically identified in the proposal. CVs should reflect recent, relevant experience and publications demonstrating expertise relevant to successful completion of the project. CVs are limited to two pages maximum per person; one page per person is acceptable.

8. Letters of Endorsement from Proposed Funding Recipients

A signed letter from an Authorized Organizational Representative (AOR) denoting that the enclosed application is accurate and approved for submission based on relevant institutional rules is required. A signed letter from an AOR of any institution or organization that would receive proposed NSRC funding (including subawards) or provide matching funds is also required. An AOR is typically someone from the institution’s office of sponsored programs or research or from the organization’s business office. This endorsement from the AOR can be provided in many different formats. No matter the form, the endorsement letter should indicate approval of submitted budget and amount as well as transmittal information for the institution, in preparation for the possibility that the proposal may be funded.

9. Letters of Commitment

A **letter of commitment** must be included from each individual and/or group identified as Collaborator or Cooperator. A letter of commitment indicates a willingness to work with the PI(s) on a project and states what the collaborator or cooperator will do for the proposed research. A sample letter of commitment could contain the following statement: “If the proposal submitted by [insert PI name] entitled [insert the proposal title] is selected for funding by the NSRC, it is my intent to collaborate as detailed in the scope of work.”

10. Letters of support

Letters of support are allowed, but letters of recommendation or support are *not* considered letters of commitment. Additional appendices of figures/tables are *not* allowed.

Proposal Submission

When your proposal is ready for submission, please access the Google Form at: <https://forms.gle/OnyVCDR Pc5aBTF1S9> where you will be asked to enter basic proposal metadata, including focus areas and priority issues relevant to your proposal. If the link does not work, please copy and paste into your browser.

After submitting the Google Form, please submit a pdf of the proposal via [NSRC Proposal Submission 2023](#). Alternatively, you can type <https://bit.ly/42XwbUk> into your browser. Files should be labeled as **Last Name_First Name_NSRC_2023**. Simply upload the combined PDF file (all proposal sections as well as the budgets and budget narratives as one PDF). Please upload the proposal PDF only once. If you do not receive a confirmation email by September 27, 2023, or have trouble with submission, please contact one of the program managers (see contact information below).

Contact Information

Questions or concerns should be addressed to the NSRC Program Managers.

Maine

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Potential USFS PIs or Co-PIs should speak with the NSRC Federal Coordinator:

Daniel C. Dey

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Governance documents (NSRC Charter, Conflict of Interest and Confidentiality Statement) are available at www.nsrcforest.org/governance.